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Currently on view at the National Building Museum is Marcel Breuer: Design and Architecture, an exhibition organized by the Vitra Design Museum that explores the diverse career of one of the modern movement’s most influential figures. This is the first component of a broad Museum initiative intended to encourage reconsideration of the legacy of 20th-century modernism, which is all too easily taken for granted by virtue of its ubiquity. As part of the initiative, this issue of Blueprints focuses on the preservation and reuse of aging modernist structures.

British novelist J. P. Hartley wrote: “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” If we accept this maxim, we might assume that proximity matters—in other words, that the recent past is likely to be less foreign than the distant past, in much the same way that Canada is more familiar to the typical American than, say, Cambodia. When it comes to history, however, that assumption may be illusory.

In architecture, the term “modern” tends to evoke images of rational, unornamented structures fabricated of human-made materials such as steel or concrete—in short, the antithesis of “historic” architecture. Nonetheless, there are numerous indisputably modern buildings that are now 50, 75, or even—by some people’s reckoning—100 years old. Many of those buildings are unquestionably significant, whether aesthetically, technologically, or historically. They are now as much a part of our cultural heritage as log cabins, corner stores, and brownstones.

Preservation groups are taking notice of the growing body of “historic modern” architecture, and there is increasing public debate about which buildings from the (relatively) recent past are worthy of keeping. Meanwhile, design and building professionals are grappling with the technical challenges of preserving or reusing modern structures, which often employed experimental materials and construction methods. The preservation of modernism is also becoming central to the sustainability movement, as proponents of modernism are grappling with the technical challenges of preserving or reusing modern structures.

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It seems, then, that our fundamental assumptions about the purpose, practice, and politics of preservation are likely to change dramatically in the near future. Is Modern the new Victorian? Perhaps not, but it clearly represents a rich and varied legacy that we are just beginning to understand.

The New Face of Preservation
Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and recipient of the ninth Vincent Scully Prize, reflects on the evolution of the American-preservation movement.

Federal Modern
The nation’s biggest landlord celebrates the jewels in its portfolio while freshening up the ugly ducklings.

Renewing Urban Renewal
In Southeast Washington, D.C., an icon of the “urban renewal” revolution in the 1950s and ’60s is now undergoing a transformation of its own.

Silo Point:
An Industrial-Strength Renovation
A seemingly obsolete industrial facility finds a new career as hip urban housing.

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Winter 2007–08

Winter 2007–08
An Interview with Richard Moe

The New Face of Preservation

by Martin Moeller

On December 13, 2007, the National Building Museum presented the ninth Vincent Scully Prize to Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The award recognized Moe’s leadership in moving preservation into the mainstream of American society and expanding the public’s understanding of the significance of our built heritage. In accepting the prize, he joined a prestigious roster of past recipients including Jane Jacobs, Phyliss Lambert, His Highness the Aga Khan, and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

In an interview excerpted here, Moe discussed some of the ways in which the National Trust and the preservation movement in general have evolved. Particularly noteworthy are the Trust’s growing commitment to the preservation of modernist buildings, many of which are now more than 50 years old, and the organization’s explicit focus on environmental sustainability.

Martin Moeller: In 1949, the same year that the National Trust was established, Philip Johnson completed his famous Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut. Do you think any of the Trust’s founders could have imagined a day when such a quintessential modern building would be designated a National Trust Historic Site?

Richard Moe: It’s interesting to think back on what the leaders of the then-new Trust would have thought of a modernist structure like that being historic. I think the more far-reaching and visionary of those men and women would have foresaw that perhaps this iconic structure would someday be historic—many, many years from now.

But the answer, I think, really lies in the history of the preservation movement. Different styles of architecture have become historic at different periods, and usually over some public resistance. For example, Victorian architecture was very unpopular with a lot of people—nobody could imagine saving that stuff. Now, of course, we prize it. Same thing with Art Deco. Well, the time of modernism has arrived, and the iconic Glass House, of course, just represents the very best of modernism, and it is historic, even in a literal and legal sense—it’s more than 50 years old.

Moeller: Have the Trust’s forays into the preservation of modernism led to any general changes in the organization’s strategies or policies?

Moe: Modernist architecture, by definition, hasn’t been with us that long, so our biggest obstacle is persuading the public that much of this is great architecture and deserves to be saved. We’ve lost a lot of great modernist structures all the time. For example, in New Canaan, where Johnson’s Glass House is located, they have been a lot of tear-downs. Great, iconic modernist structures have been torn down and replaced with McMansions.

We are going to take steps in the very near future to set up a Recent Past Initiative in our Western Office in California and a Center for Modernism based at the Glass House in New Canaan, to give specific focus to these styles of architecture. In terms of the recent past, something need not be historic to have value and to be worthy of being preserved. So we are breaking the mold a little bit here. Some of our predecessors in the preservation movement didn’t think that we should preserve anything before its time came. Well, unfortunately, we lose a lot in the first 50 years, and sometimes we have to intervene and save the best of the recent past, which is what we are trying to do.

Moeller: A burgeoning interest in modernism is just one aspect of what the Trust calls “the new face of preservation in America.” Another is the growing participation of diverse ethnic groups and communities. What is the Trust doing to reach new constituencies?

Moe: We have really tried hard in recent years to expand the constituency for preservation and to make it clear that preservation is relevant to everyone in this country regardless of where they are, or what they do, or what their income level is. I think we have to concede candidly that 50 years ago preservation appealed to very few people—it was mostly people who cared about great old houses, and that was fine and still a lot of us do that. But preservation’s evolved enormously over the last 50 years, and it really has become relevant to more and more people.

We’re broadening the definition of what preservation really is. And in doing that, we’ve undertaken a very serious and far-reaching effort to diversify not just the National Trust, but the preservation movement. At my very first National Preservation Conference in Miami 16 years ago, we initiated a Diversity Scholarship Program, which...

Photo by Tony Nelson.

Ontline Video! To see a video of the interview with Richard Moe, visit www.nbm.org.
literally changed the face of our annual conference. These were largely minority students, people from lower-income neighborhoods, whom we brought to the conference as diversity scholars. We’ve continued to do that.

Moeller: Another aspect of the “new face of preservation” is the Trust’s explicit focus on sustainability. How are you promoting preservation as an environmental imperative?

Moe: We have long maintained that preservation of older buildings is inherently a sustainable activity. The restoration and reuse of older buildings is the ultimate recycling. We’re saving enormous energy, we’re saving natural resources, we’re filling fewer landfills.

We are now undertaking a program at the Trust to research these factors quantitatively. In this time of trying to combat climate change and CO2 emissions, we think preservation has a lot to contribute in this area, and [we will be taking] these data and converting them into public policy proposals. Should there be new tax credits? Should there be changes in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties? In the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] standards, should preservation get more credit?

The other thing we’re doing—on our new website—is trying to help owners of historic homes and other buildings learn how they can retrofit their existing buildings and make them more energy-efficient and greener.

Moeller: One of the Trust’s most widely known initiatives is its annual list of the 11 Most Endangered Places. How are the sites selected each year, and what exactly does the Trust use this list to advance its advocacy efforts?

Moe: The criteria are quite broad: it’s a historic site that’s threatened by some cause. I like to say that [it] fulfills a specific site that’s listed, and then they spend as long as it takes to try to remove that threat.

Moeller: Clearly, one of the most endangered places in the country today is the city of New Orleans. What are the latest developments in the Trust’s efforts to protect the city’s built heritage in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina?

Moe: Hurricane Katrina, in my view, represented not just a great human tragedy but also… probably the greatest cultural disaster in the history of our country. There were many more historic properties lost or threatened at any other time in our history. In the city of New Orleans itself, there are some 20 National Register [historic] districts. They encompass physically half of the city. They contain 9,000 historic structures, most of them shotgun houses, Creole cottages, corner stores, and so forth, but great historic buildings. And most of those were flooded. Most of them can be saved.

We opened an office right away in New Orleans, and we’ve worked with our partners with shared field staff in Mississippi and we’re still doing that, and we’ve said we’ll do it as long as it takes. We’ve raised several million dollars, we’ve done a lot of advocacy, we’ve persuaded Congress to appropriate $50 million so far just for historic properties in the Gulf Coast. We have worked with our partners in New Orleans to stop the demolition—the unnecessary demolition—of historic sites, and this is all coming to a head now because FEMA has established deadlines for compensating homeowners for demolition. So far we think we’ve helped save over 600 homes, and I hope we can save many more.

Moeller: How have the economics of preservation changed over the past couple of decades?

Moe: If you take a look back over the history of preservation in America, there have been different themes underlying it—different reasons why preservation’s been regarded as important. If you go back to the very earliest days when Mount Vernon was saved by Ann Pamela Cunningham and a group of courageous, effective women, they were trying to save a great architectural treasure, and that’s what preservation was for a hundred years. Then in the middle of the 20th century, that started to change, and people started seeing the economic value of preservation, and they started setting up revolving funds, and they saw the value of adaptive reuse—using a building for a purpose other than that for which it was designed. And then came the adoption of federal tax credits, which were a great incentive. The whole theory behind historic tax credits was that the public gets to enjoy the continued historic value of the exterior of a building, and that’s a great public benefit, which now, happily, has expanded to 29 states.

Moeller: One of your fellow Scully Prize recipients was Jane Jacobs, who argued that healthy communities need a variety of buildings in terms of age, use, and size. How have her views influenced your work?

Moe: We owe a lot to Jane Jacobs and I think we owe especially a debt of gratitude for her really making us understand the value of eclectic neighborhoods, with different kinds of buildings, different eras of buildings, different uses. She was a great advocate of mixed uses, as am I. This is what makes vibrant communities, really lively communities, interesting communities that attract people. I think the most vibrant downtowns, for example, in America, are those that have saved their great iconic historic buildings, but they’ve also built great new buildings. …it’s really a blending of the old and the new together that makes for a great city.

Moeller: In what areas is the United States at the forefront of preservation compared to other countries around the world?

Moe: The United States is clearly in the lead on the Main Street program, [which is] probably the most successful program the Trust has ever had. We’ve been in over 2,000 communities revitalizing downtowns with the business community saying that there is, and really trying to make downtowning a more attractive place to come and a more successful place to do business. And it’s not just preservation—fixing up the old storefronts and putting in public amenities—but it’s also organizing the business community, re-marketing it effectively. Hiring in the vacancies, and making it possible to compete with the big-box retailers.

Every dollar that we put into a Main Street program leverages $49 of public and private money brought to the community. Now we’ve brought the program to larger cities—not the downtowns of larger cities, but neighborhoods and mixed-use developments—and the same principles have applied. It’s very important for communities to have viable commercial districts so not everybody has to go out to the strip mall or the big box stores to their shopping. And this is a program that doesn’t really exist anywhere else in the world, and there’s a lot of interest in it.

Similarly, with tax credits—although every country’s tax system is different—the fact that we give tax credits for investing in historic buildings is something that those countries who have tax systems that lend themselves to this...

Moeller: Where do you think the preservation movement is headed in the near future?

Moe: I wouldn’t be surprised if preservation expanded its wings somewhat soon and got into contemporary design issues. In other words, if we’re being asked to preserve what’s important, why shouldn’t we contribute to making new buildings important and significant? That’s a bit of a reach now, but I can foresee the day when that might be seriously discussed.

It’s really intriguing to try to look forward. Obviously, we’ll have different styles of architecture—that will continue to evolve—and they will eventually become historic, and the best of those styles of architecture will deserve to be preserved. So just as we’ve experienced this with Victorian architecture and Art Deco and modernism, we’ll experience it with whatever is in to come. And something else will come for sure. •
Federal Modern
Assessing and Preserving a Legacy

by Susan Piedmont-Palladino

SUSAN PIEDMONT-PALLADINO is a curator at the National Building Museum and a professor of architecture at Virginia Tech’s Washington-Alexandria Architecture Center.

“...it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Charles Dickens was referring to the period just before the French Revolution, but could just as easily have been describing the architecture commissioned by the U.S. government after the Second World War, with its decidedly mixed legacy of buildings and cityscapes. The decades from the 1950s to the 70s gave us the architecture of the post-war economic boom and then the Great Society, with the promise of an efficient and transparent government ensconced in buildings to match. But during that time old buildings were regularly razed in the name of progress and too often replaced by banal boxes indistinguishable from typical office buildings of the time.

Now, what was once new is old, and one of the largest landlords and property managers in the country, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), finds itself with a huge portfolio of buildings and landscapes, the majority of which were built in the last 50 years. The frequently used, catch-all descriptors “mid-century modern” and “post-war” embody in shorthand just how much the architecture after World War II differed from that which came before. These differences pose unique challenges for the caretakers of that architectural legacy, and for the citizens in whose name these buildings were designed and constructed. In the United States, true modernism really arrived with the end of the war: literally, with the immediate need, not to mention managing those that already existed. The biggest federal building boom started about two decades later, beginning with the Public Works Administration during the Great Depression, accelerating during the mobilization for World War II and escalating in the years following the war. The construction program even before the war more than doubled the total number of buildings under government ownership. In 1949, President Harry Truman established the GSA, recognizing the exponential increase in the responsibilities for designing and constructing the buildings that the larger central government would need, not to mention managing those that already existed. Indeed, in its first decade, the agency focused on simply bringing order to the diverse portfolio it had inherited.

By the early 1960s, a series of Executive Orders and Congressional legislation cemented attitudes that were already changing regarding federal building. Several attempted to remedy the perceived aloofness and insularity of the first modern buildings. Among the most influential was a set of principles issued in 1961 that came from a committee convened by President John F. Kennedy to take stock of the state of federal architecture. Written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a lifelong champion of excellence in building and city design, the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture encouraged the “finest contemporary American architectural thought.” They urged architects to be sensitive to context, treat the site and landscape as equally important as the building, and warned against any official “style” of architecture. As with all guidelines, the generalities are unassailable, but the details are wicked. What is the “finest contemporary American architectural thought” and who decides? At the time, it wasn’t entirely clear.

The twin forces of economic growth and the desire for newness threatened buildings and landscapes throughout the 1950s and ’60s. Iconic single acts of destruction, such as the demolition of Penn Station in New York City, as well the Federal Highway Administration’s inexorable paving of city and countryside, were among the forces that motivated the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. Recognizing that “the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic...
A Campaign to Preserve Modern Landmarks

Today the complex interplay between environmen-
tal conservation and historic preservation is being
brought to bear on the very buildings and landscapes
that were young then. The irony is inescapable: The
National Historic Preservation Act set out to protect
the familiar, often beloved, yet arguably inefficient
and old-fashioned buildings of previous centuries
from demolition by the forces of progress. Now, the
very buildings that were once the enemies of history
can enjoy the generous embrace of preservation—if
they can pass the test. The 1966 act fundamentally
changed the way the government, the public, and the
design community saw older buildings, but seeing the
work of the recent past in the same light still
presents a challenge. "In many people's minds," explains
Rolando Brain-Camp, FIMA, director of GSA's Center
for Historic Buildings, "historical equals 'traditional,'
so making the case to preserve modern buildings is a
challenge." To address that challenge, the center issued
Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture:
• Efficient and Modern: GSA Buildings from
the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. The study includes a rigorous set
of criteria for assessing the merit of modern federal
buildings.
• Growth, Efficiency, and Modern: GSA Buildings from
the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. The study includes a rigorous set
of criteria for assessing the merit of modern federal
buildings.
• "Preservation Act to ensure that the "finest contemporary
architectural thought" is represented from every
era of our history.

Determining the Fate of Less Important Structures

Clearly, not everything warrants preservation. Decid-
ing among the alternatives—remove, re-clad, reuse,
or demolish—requires an assessment of the relative merits
of the structure itself and its potential for other uses. The
issue of the Strom Thurmond Courthouse in South
Carolina, completed in 1968, is a good example. While the
office tower still serves the federal courts, the building's
architecture, but its potential historical
significance, and the significance it may have to the
community. In some cases, being able to connect
a building to a specific architect is sufficient to save it,
or at least forestall its demolition.

Such was the case with the Strom Thurmond Federal
Building and U.S. Courthouse, in Columbia, South
Carolina. Completed in 1976, the exposed concrete
structure had been designed by Marcel
Breuer and Associates and
completed in 1968. By
then, the building was
"young" in the modern
time. The government
commissioned a study to
evaluate the building's
significance, and the significance it may have to the
community. In some cases, being able to connect
a building to a specific architect is sufficient to save it,
or at least forestall its demolition.

Federal construction has been influenced by all of the
same movements and counter-movements that have swept
through architecture and design in a whole in the last
century, each seemingly connected to the onset of its im-
mmediate predecessors. The ethos of preservation has given
us a more generous perspective on the past, including the
recent past. "We have a responsibility to the evolution of
architecture," says Ryan Camp. "We can't cut out a part
of it and still claim to tell a true or complete story." Modern-
ism itself is more eclectic than we often think—com-
prising stripped classicism, New Deal muralist and heroic
sculpture, streamlined Art Deco, béton brut, and the much-
maligned glass box. Each building and landscape in GSA's
portfolio reflects some aspect of the relationship between
the government and the citizens at the time the project
was built. The Center for Historic Buildings is marshalling
the spirit of the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture
with the principles of stewardship in the National Historic
Preservation Act to ensure that the "finest contemporary
American architectural thought" is represented from every
era of our history.

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A Case Study in Southwest D.C.

Renewing Urban Renewal

by Amanda Murphy

The innermost part of Washington, D.C.’s Southwest quadrant is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, pre-dating the establishment of the federal city. Few remnants of these early days remain, however, thanks to the sweeping, post-World War II urban renewal initiatives that erased much of the area’s architectural heritage. Today, despite its proximity to the capital’s monumental core, this precinct is largely overlooked by tourists and locals alike.

Given its relative obscurity, coupled with the fact that most of its buildings are barely 50 years old, Southwest D.C. would seem an unlikely focus of a historic preservation campaign; yet it is becoming just that. Like other post-war urban renewal zones that are now coming of age, the area is increasingly recognized as a site of historical and architectural significance. Recently, due to rising real estate pressures in D.C., planners, developers, and architects have begun to consider opportunities to restore and enhance some of the defining characteristics of this modernist neighborhood while fixing obvious urbanistic errors of the past.

The Urban Renewal Era

Between 1950 and 1965, more than 150 acres of small businesses, working-class row houses, and slum dwellings in Southwest were cleared in the name of remaking D.C.—as President Harry Truman put it—“the best-planned city in the world.” A vibrant if decrepit old neighborhood was soon replaced by costly rational high-rise apartment blocks, Brutalist federal office buildings, modern town houses and churches, open green space, and parking lots. Such ambitious redevelopment schemes were common throughout the country during that time. Breuer himself designed two government buildings in Southwest and some of Gropius and Breuer’s students, including I.M. Pei, would also have an influence on the new modern landscape in a city that had been, until that time, emphatically traditional.

The result of their efforts was one of the first truly modern urban neighborhoods—and one of the most successful urban renewal efforts—anywhere in the country. Unlike many similar projects in other cities, Southwest ultimately managed to attract and retain solidly middle-class individuals and families. A half-century after many of its constituent developments were completed, it is now a well-maintained, leafy, quiet enclave with much to offer both residents and visitors.

Nonetheless, the original Southwest plan had serious flaws that were typical of large-scale urban renewal schemes of the period. Inward-facing superblocks diminished street activity; cul-de-sacs confused traffic circulation; high fences isolated residents from one another; and unrealized projects such as a town center and a grand mall on 10th Street showed the dangers of attempting to start over from scratch. Such fundamental design decisions have prevented the neighborhood from becoming a truly vital, modern community.

A Second Rebirth

Today, Southwest is on the brink of its most significant redevelopment since the initial urban renewal period. Residents, preservationists, planners, architects, and developers are once again actively exploring possibilities for radical changes to the neighborhood, while this time acknowledging the need to preserve existing architectural resources.

David Maloney, the state historic preservation officer for D.C., is optimistic that a proposed development called Fairfield at Marina View will serve as a model for the reconsideration of Southwest—one in which existing modernist buildings are gently renovated while new structures are added into the mix. This project, led by the Washington architecture firm of Esocoff & Associates, involves the rehabilitation of two apartment buildings in the Town Center complex designed by I.M. Pei and completed in 1962. Importantly, however, Fairfield at Marina View will also entail the construction of two new residential buildings, renovation and reconfiguration of public open spaces, and a plan for reconnecting the complex with the surrounding neighborhood.

Although the Pei buildings are not registered landmarks, the architects and the developer, Fairfield Residential, decided to work with the D.C. Historic Preservation Office, D.C. Preservation League, and other interested parties to devise a plan in which the two towers would be treated sensitively. Ultimately, there was agreement that, whatever alterations were made to Town Center, the property should retain sufficient historic and architectural integrity to remain

Amanda Murphy is a development coordinator at the National Building Museum. She is currently pursuing a master’s in Historic Preservation from Goucher College.
In rehabilitating the Pei buildings, Esocoff’s firm went to great lengths to apply the nationally recognized preservation guidelines known as the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, which provide direction for even the most minute details of a project. For example, hairline cracks in Pei’s concrete structure are being cleared of the mismatched grout that was applied in a haphazard fashion over the years. They will be re-patched with grout of a more compatible color, and then sealed with a clear coat. This method will allow the original texture and color of the concrete—as well as the natural patina it has acquired over time—to remain visible.

Windows posed a bigger problem. The original single-glazed units were energy-inefficient, and their thin aluminum frames were not structurally capable of supporting new insulated glass panels. It was therefore unavoidable that the old windows would need to be replaced. However, a thoughtful way to preserve Pei’s design intent was devised. First, the characteristic dimensions of the existing windows—7 feet by 7 feet—will be retained. While the new window frames are thicker than the original, they will be two-toned, with an outer silver band similar in scale to the full width of Pei’s originals. The inner, dark bronze band of the new frames will visually recede and be subsumed into the varying window treatments and lighting conditions of individual apartment units inside.

Esocoff noted that the window problem raises philosophical questions that preservationists will need to address in order for other modernist buildings to be eligible for historic preservation tax credits, since so many buildings of this era feature exterior almost entirely of glass. Would removal of these original features compromise a structure’s architectural integrity? Can 80% or more of a building’s exterior be removed without running afoul of generally accepted historic preservation standards? If those standards do not allow full replacement, how can the building conform to even minimal standards for thermal efficiency? Such questions illuminate the delicate—and sometimes difficult—balance that architects and preservationists must pursue when trying to figure out how best to adapt older structures to current standards.

New Design Based on Neighborhood Precedent

In designing the two new towers for Fairfield at Marina View, Esocoff and senior associate Linda Palmer, Associate AIA, wanted them to complement, rather than match, the Pei buildings. They decided to survey other urban renewal-era buildings in the area for inspiration. Noting that even the mid-20th-century modernists often looked to classical antiquity and other periods for ideas, Esocoff said, “The built environment is a book you can open and read.”

The design for the new construction is largely inspired by Chloistood Woodland Smith’s nearby Capitol Park apartment towers, which date from the late 1950s and early ’60s and were the first Southwest urban renewal-era buildings to receive a historic landmark designation. Esocoff’s buildings will feature undulating curved walls of glass and concrete, cantilevered metal balconies, and obvious “non-supporting” decorative brick features—all elements that Smith used in the design of her buildings. Esocoff feels the new buildings reflect the essential elements of both Pei and Smith’s buildings without actually copying their specific motifs.

Repairing the Modernist Breach of the Streetscape

As part of the Marina View project, much of the original Town Center landscape will also be restored, though the high walls and fences that currently separate the complex and from the street will be removed, and pedestrian walkways, public garden areas, and refreshment stands will be added. This aspect of the project is being directed by the landscape architecture firm of Zion Breen Richardson; partner Don Richardson worked on the original design of Town Center while an associate with the firm, then known as Zion Breen, in the 1960s.

In a sense, the construction of two new residential buildings just outboard of the original Town Center towers may be viewed as a historic restoration of sorts. After all, the modest buildings that the Town Center towers replaced would have come right up to the sidewalk, thus creating a strong street edge typical in 19th-century cities. By contrast, the post-war buildings were sited in the modernist fashion as “towers in the park,” allowing for more green space and parking lots, but also destroying the clear sense of the streetscape. By placing buildings along the street lines once again, Esocoff is undoing one of the urban design blunders common in Southwest. Moreover, the residential building facing M Street will have retail and restaurants on the first floor, reinforcing the character of that street as a commercial corridor.

Another way in which the Marina View project will improve upon the mid-20th-century urban pattern is through environmentally conscious design strategies. The Pei towers, for instance, will be retrofitted with green roofs, while the new buildings will be topped with green roofs from the start. The landscape design also incorporates multi-modal planning that will encourage walking and bicycling, while still accommodating cars in an appropriate way.

If Fairfield at Marina View proves successful, the D.C. Historic Preservation Office is likely to consider using the project as an explicit model for guidelines for future redevelopment of urban renewal-era structures in Southwest. Like everyone involved in this endeavor, Maloney, the D.C. preservation officer, is hopeful that the project will demonstrate that modernist buildings can be both meaningfully preserved and carefully updated to meet the needs of present-day living.
Silo Point

An Industrial-Strength Renovation

By Christopher Pfaeffle, AIA, NCARB

During the winter of 2003, Patrick Turner, president of Turner Development Group, and I meandered through one of his company’s recent acquisitions: the towering shell of what was once the world’s largest and fastest grain elevator. The Locust Point Grain Terminal Elevator, built by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1923 on the southernmost peninsula in the city of Baltimore, stood hauntingly quiet except for the sound of faraway seagulls and the occasional train passing through on the tracks below. While the concrete was damp and the windows squeaky and tilted, our tour provoked the kind of raw wonder that any five-year-old might experience when seeing such an astonishing sight for the first time. Our ambition was to transform the iconic structure—along with portions of the adjacent array of 187 silos—into a sleek, modern residential complex while still respecting the original building’s industrial character.

Pat and I never once considered demolishing the elevator tower, despite the naysayers who insisted that the only sensible approach was to take it down and build from scratch. While starting with a blank slate is often easier, it was just not an option in this case as we came to admire the grittily elegant structure. We were convinced that saving the building was worth the effort, and four years after our initial visit, the complex that we now call Silo Point is finally being transformed from an archaic industrial facility into a stylish condominium with 228 airy apartments.

Preservation of modern-era buildings is not limited to landmarks designed by famous architects. As this article about a project called Silo Point makes clear, the American landscape includes industrial buildings and other essentially modern structures that could easily be forgotten or dismissed, but in fact can be handsomely and profitably transformed to serve new purposes. While such projects are likely to entail substantial changes to the existing structures rather than pure restoration, they nonetheless can serve to preserve important aspects of a community’s historic character while also minimizing expenditures for entirely new resources.

Christopher Pfaeffle, AIA, NCARB, is principal and founder of Parameter Inc. in Baltimore, and is the architect for Silo Point.

Sign Me Up!

Silo Point was the subject of one of the Museum’s popular Construction Watch Tours, which are open to members. If you are not a member and would like to sign up in order to participate in the tours, contact the Membership Department at 202.272.2448, ext. 3200, or mdavis@nbm.org.
Old Dog, New Tricks

We wanted to create a cutting-edge work of architecture that would reveal much of its past without expressing it too literally. Our adaptive reuse strategy involved coming to an understanding of how the building was designed and how it worked, and then translating that into a modern use. For example, one of the most important aspects of the grain elevator structure was the sense of vastness one felt when walking around both the interior and exterior. We wanted to preserve that aspect of the elevator building’s character while taking advantage of every opportunity to let the building tell its own story.

When approaching any adaptive reuse project, the design team must decide which elements of the existing structure to retain and which to remove. In the case of the B&O grain elevator, the extant concrete tower was tall, narrow, and long, with views of the harbor and city skyline. It was easy to see how that arrangement could translate very well into a modern residential project. In contrast, the windowless, virtually impenetrable storage silos would not lend themselves readily to any other uses. It quickly became clear that keeping the entire silo farm was not possible, so we devised an alternative strategy to maintain a small number of the silos and to incorporate them into the new complex. The retained silos will serve as visual anchors, as well as highly evocative relics of the site’s industrial past. The new silos will serve as visual anchors, as well as highly evocative relics of the site’s industrial past. The new construction to preserve the project’s historical continuity. In the end, original beams and columns remained in place, as we found ways to make the contemporary apartments conform to the unusual structural dimensions. Ultimately, as we came to understand the ramifications of this decision, it helped us to design better living units.

Another challenge was the 16-foot-by-16-foot structural grid that was used throughout the original elevator and silos. Although such a grid bears no relationship to typical modern dimensions for residential construction, we felt compelled to retain it and integrate it into the new construction to preserve the project’s historical continuity. In the end, original beams and columns remained in place, as we found ways to make the contemporary apartments conform to the unusual structural dimensions. Ultimately, as we came to understand the ramifications of this decision, it helped us to design better living units.

The incorporation of elevators—for people, that is, rather than grain—also posed quite a problem. In a typical new construction project, stock elevators are placed in shafts designed specifically to accommodate them. At Silo Point, elevators had to be custom made to fit in the building’s existing silos on that unusual 16-foot-by-16-foot grid. Moreover, we had to design special platforms in adjacent silos to access the elevators’ counterweights, and had to “suspend” elevator pits in the basement. Additionally, new elevators were placed at the perimeter of the project.

A Striking Model for Urban Living

Any new residential development must stand out from its competitors, of course. Fortunately for Silo Point, the site’s vivid history, awe-inspiring structures, and waterfront setting make for an inherently interesting and attractive living environment.

The public spaces of the complex are designed to celebrate the project’s origins. Robust, octagonal columns march through the main lobby, emphasizing the great weight of the structure above and creating dramatic perspectives. The basilica-like quality of this space will serve as a powerful reminder of the vastness of the original structure that so impressed us on our initial visit. Visitors will be able to look up and see the lintels of the grain silos rising 16 stories overhead. The lobby itself—aside from the columns—will remain practically empty.

The columns in the lobby extend into the lower level, which will house a fitness club, a business center, a billiards room, a wine club, and a gallery. The lower-level spaces will feature exposed pile caps, which will further enhance the visitor’s appreciation of the massive structure.

The additions to the building, including the elements interwoven with the remaining silos and a multi-story block on top of the existing tower, are being constructed out of concrete, glass, and various forms of corrugated metal. A 350-car parking garage, capped by two-and three-level townhouse-like structures, will be linked to the tower by a three-story glass bridge. In a project of this type, a cookie-cutter approach to apartment layout would be impossible, and Silo Point will therefore offer a broad range of unit options. To pay homage to the site’s history, we decided to call the residential units “bins.” Each “bin” number will be illuminated on the floor in front of the apartment door—an allusion to the original system in which a plate in the floor identified the number of each storage bin. Some condos units will have ceilings as high as 18-feet, most with floor-to-ceiling windows. Units near the top of the skyscraper will have glass on two or three sides, and since no nearby buildings approach the complex’s 22-story height—and current zoning prevents any other high-rise construction in the area—Silo Point’s residents will enjoy spectacular views for years to come.

Another important design consideration was the provision of outdoor space for residents. Every bin at Silo Point has access to some kind of outdoor area—be it a private balcony, the lushly landscaped common terrace on the roof, or the walking trails that surround the property. The landscape design will allude to the complex’s original use by incorporating mounds representing the volume of grain that would fit in one silo, as well as grain-like plantings.

In the end, we expect that Silo Point will be an exciting and dynamic marriage of seemingly disparate histories, uses, materials, and forms. The project also serves as a compelling reminder that our landscape is dotted with many structures—some abandoned, others merely underutilized—that may be ripe for new functions. By preserving and adapting elements of a structure that could easily be dismissed as a white elephant, we hope to create a unique and vibrant residential community that will serve as a model for urban revitalization in Baltimore and elsewhere.
Sixth Turner Prize Recognizes Gehry and Colleagues

by Scott Kratz, Vice President for Education

On October 3, 2007, more than 1,100 people gathered in the National Building Museum’s Great Hall to celebrate the sixth recipient of the Henry C. Turner Award for Innovation in Construction Technology: Gehry Partners and Gehry Technologies. Accepting the award were founder and principal architect Frank Gehry on behalf of Gehry Partners and chief technology officer Dennis Shelden on behalf of Gehry Technologies. Gehry is known around the world for his sinuous buildings that push the boundaries of construction and engineering technology. Such cutting-edge work has been made possible by continuous advances in computer-aided design by Gehry’s affiliated digital technology firm.

The Henry C. Turner Prize, named after the founder of Turner Construction Company, recognizes an invention, an innovative methodology, and/or exceptional leadership by an individual or team of individuals in construction technology. Jury chair Norbert Young, president of McGraw-Hill Construction, said that Gehry “challenged the industry to innovate new construction methods.” He added that Gehry Partners and Gehry Technologies leveraged software and digital design to create some of the world’s most recognizable structures.

Thomas R. Turner, vice president of Turner Construction Company, commended the selection, saying, “The Turner Prize recognizes achievements that have had a transformative impact on the built environment and the jury’s choice of Gehry Partners and Gehry Technologies strongly reflects this criterion.”

Since its inception in 2002, the Turner Prize has been awarded to structural engineer Leslie E. Robertson, architect I.M. Pei, engineer and builder Charles A. DeBenedittis, the U.S. Green Building Council, and, most recently, Stanford professor Paul Teicholz. The prize carries a cash award of $25,000 from an endowment established by Turner Construction Company.

The Henry C. Turner Prize recipients Dennis Shelden and Frank Gehry discuss the future of innovation in construction technology above:

Gone Fission: Can the Nuclear Industry Help Save the Environment? opposite left: Norbert Young, president of McGraw-Hill Construction, and 2007 Turner Prize recipients Dennis Shelden and Frank Gehry discuss the future of innovation in construction technology online. To see a video from the October award ceremony, visit the Museum’s website at www.nbm.org.
An Interview with Daniel Donnelly

by James Telford, Associate Outreach Programs Coordinator

Growing up in the antiques industry, his father an estate auctioneer and his mother an interior designer, Daniel Donnelly learned at a young age how to cultivate, collect, and create quality furniture. Twenty-one years ago, he established an antique and custom furniture shop in Old Town Alexandria and has seen it grow into a full-fledged modern design studio. He produces his own line of furniture, sells classic pieces from the likes of Marcel Breuer and Charles and Ray Eames, and restores vintage furniture.

This fall, Donnelly collaborated with the Museum’s Design Apprenticeship Program (DAP) to offer guidance to area high school students as they constructed furniture for donation to a local organization called the Dinner Program for Homeless Women. In the interview excerpted below, he talked about his design work and experiences with the DAP kids.

James Telford: What is your design philosophy?

Daniel Donnelly: It varies—most times the solution is just a slight shift in approach or different angle of attack. Some designers tend to overthink a problem. You just need to keep it simple. Let your materials do the work. Let your materials serve their original purpose. When envisioning a space, I start as a minimalist, then layer details—work on functionality first, then let the contents work themselves in. I try not to manipulate materials too much.

Telford: What led to the resurgence of interest in mid-20th-century furniture?

Donnelly: I think it is a generational thing. Appreciation of popular styles tends to skip a generation. In our case, this happened to coincide with a generation that produced an enormous output of inspired design. Mid-century design embodies a functional approach to living spaces and is a good fit with our technology culture today. Herman Miller realized the groundswell in the early ’90s and re-released its classic collection. Since then others have followed, including me. You no longer have to search through antique shops or family estates to find the work of Eames, Nelson, or Noguchi.

Telford: What was the DAP students’ biggest challenge in creating furniture for the Dinner Program for Homeless Women?

Donnelly: Comfort. The students are creating seating for this organization, seating that will be used quite often. The challenge is, how can they make it comfortable and durable? How can they create seat cushions that will last a long period of time? What materials are available to do this? If they choose not to use seat cushions, how will the materials they use to construct the furniture create a comfortable design? These are the questions they have to answer.

Telford: What did you learn from your experience with the students?

Donnelly: I am extremely impressed with the quality of questions the students asked during our initial meeting. They were thinking like designers. It was so refreshing to be in conversation with them. They wanted to know everything about the space, what the constraints were, and how to solve the problem. It was apparent the students wanted to meet the needs of their clients. I would continue to encourage their problem-solving skills.

A good designer is an excellent problem solver. If they continue the cultivation of the skills I have seen so far, these students will be on the right track.
Hardy Headlines Members’ Event
by Mark Davis, Membership Manager

Last summer, members of the Museum’s Builders and Professional Circle groups enjoyed an evening reception and presentation by Hugh Hardy, FAIA, principal of H+ Hardy Collaboration Architecture LLC based in New York. Hardy is known for high-profile public projects including the restoration of Radio City Music Hall and the design of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. His lively remarks provided insights into Hardy’s creative endeavors, including the firm’s contribution to the Museum’s recent exhibition Reinventing the Globe: A Shakespearean Theater for the 21st Century—a hypothetical theater in the middle of Times Square that could be adapted to travel to all of New York City’s five boroughs. The entertaining evening included a special surprise: a cake in honor of Hardy’s birthday, which he happily shared with members. To join The Builders or The Professional Circle and receive invitations for programs and events like these, please contact Mark Davis, Membership Manager, at 202.272.3448, ext. 3500, or mdavis@nbm.org.

National Building Museum and Kreeger Museum to Offer Joint Study Tour
“Cradle of Modernism: The Bauhaus Legacy in Four German Cities”
by Martin Moeller, Senior Vice President and Curator

The National Building Museum and the Kreeger Museum are cooperating to offer an unprecedented tour tracing the legacy of the Bauhaus, the groundbreaking school that changed the course of modern design history. Scheduled for September 12–22, 2008, the tour will feature the three cities that successively served as home to the school—Wittum, Dessau, and Berlin—as well as Stuttgart. The itinerary includes visits to architectural landmarks designed by Bauhaus faculty, museums that contain works by Bauhaus masters, and other sites of historic or architectural importance.

The tour will begin in Stuttgart, site of the Weissenhof housing complex, which was one of the largest works by Bauhaus architects, and two important art museums—the Kunstmuseum and the Staatsgalerie. In Weimar, stops will include the Art Nouveau house of Henry van de Velde, who headed the predecessor institution to the Bauhaus, as well as the historic homes of major literary figures such as Goethe and Nietzsche. The highlight of the stay in Dessau will be the famous Bauhaus itself—the only entirely new structure ever built for the school—and the houses of Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius and other leading teachers. The tour concludes in Berlin, where participants will visit the Bauhaus Archives, the National Gallery designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the contemporary Jewish Museum by Daniel Libeskind.

After the lecture, the Museum and STUDIOS architecture hosted a reception in the Pension Commissioner’s Suite, with nearly ten guests including Corbinian and Professional Circle members, and STUDIOS architecture staff and clients.

Spotlight on DeGarmo
by Melinda Hungerman, Corporate and Association Relations Manager

On September 24, a crowd of more than 250 people attended a lecture by Todd DeGarmo of STUDIOS architecture presented by the Museum as part of its prestigious Spotlight on Design series. As CEO of STUDIOS architecture and founder of the firm’s New York office, DeGarmo has had a profound influence on the design of base buildings, renovations, historic preservation, and interior architecture. In his lecture, he discussed how the Washington, DC office’s expertise has informed national and international projects, including the interior of the IAC/InterActiveCorp headquarters by Frank Gehry, the Bloomberg LP headquarters, and the Kingman Island Environmental Education Center.

DeGarmo, who has also held teaching positions at the Rhode Island School of Design, David Macaulay, and to support the Museum’s exhibition: David Macaulay: The Art of Drawing Architecture.

After being open for more than three months, the raffle was held on September 14th. The lucky winners were Museum members Michael D. Blau and Jacqueline A. Moore, who is also a member of the Museum’s Teacher Advisory Board. Both glass artists in their own right, Michael and Jacqueline said they were thrilled to have won and are looking forward to enjoying this beautiful piece in their home.

And the Winner is…
by Mary Zeh, Assistant Director of Development

This past summer, the Museum held a raffle for the chance to win the elegant sculpture Cobalt Poppy Lips Basket Set with Red Poppy Lip Wrap (2001) created by world-renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly. Chihuly generously donated this piece as a salute to his former classmate at the Rhode Island School of Design, David Macaulay, and to support the Museum’s exhibition: David Macaulay: The Art of Drawing Architecture.

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The National Building Museum explores the world we build for ourselves—from our homes, skyscrapers, and public buildings to our parks, bridges, and shopping centers. The Museum seeks to educate the public about achievements in architecture, engineering, design, and construction, and to recognize the people who create them. Founded in 1980, the National Building Museum is a private, nonprofit institution. Its education programs and exhibitions engage people of all ages on all levels. Founded by architect Robert A. M. Stern, the Museum is an outgrowth of a series of programs and exhibitions he organized at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, called “Blueprints.”

The Mystery Building was created by architect Robert A.M. Stern in his capacity as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. It was presented at the Museum’s opening on October 22, 1980.

The Mystery Building remains a mystery...
DRAWING THE MUSEUM

Limited Edition Antoine Predock Print

by Johanna Dunkel, Marketing Communications Manager

In 2001, the National Building Museum commissioned renowned architect Cesar Pelli to create a portrait of our historic home. The result was an oil pastel of the Museum’s brick and terra cotta main façade. The limited-edition print of the drawing was very popular, and soon sold out.

This year, the Museum once again commissioned a leading architect—2006 AIA Gold Medalist Antoine Predock—to draw the Museum. Predock’s drawing beautifully and evocatively depicts the Museum’s Great Hall and its famed Corinthian columns. Only 100 of the 18” x 24”, signed, and numbered prints were produced and they are available exclusively at the National Building Museum Shop. Be sure to pick one up today.

The Pelli and Predock prints are the first two in a series of drawings that the Museum intends to commission. Stay tuned for information on the next drawing in the series.

$270.00 Museum members / $300.00 Public